

REVIEW OF *ORAL LANGUAGE ARCHIVE*

Title:	<i>Oral Language Archive</i>
Distributor:	Carnegie Mellon University
Contact information:	OLA Project Department of Modern Languages-Baker Hall 160 Carnegie Mellon University Pittsburgh, PA 15213-3890 Fax: (412) 268-1328 E-mail: ola-mail@andrew.cmu.edu
Program information:	http://ml.hss.cmu.edu/LLRC/ola/
System requirements:	OLA Audio CD-ROM: Mac (16-32 MB RAM, CD-ROM drive, System 7 or higher); PC (16-32 MB RAM, CD-ROM drive, sound card configured for audio CD-ROM, Windows 95 or 97). OLA Audio with CD-ROM + OLA Player: Mac (System 7 or higher, HyperCard Player 2.0 or higher; For Japanese Player: Japanese Language Kit or System 8.5). Web-based Intranet version: Mac (Netscape or MIE version 3 or higher, QuickTime Plug-in); PC (Netscape or MIE version 3 or higher, QuickTime Plug-in).
Price:	Single volume of a language archive on audio CD-ROM: \$35.00. Site license for a single volume of a language archive: \$250.00. Single volume intranet license : \$100.00.

Reviewed by Claire Bradin, Michigan State University

OVERVIEW

As stated in the [Overview](#) for the Oral Language Archive (OLA) Project, "Exposure to authentic language is critical for the building of communicative competence in foreign languages." The OLA Project adheres to this premise by providing opportunities for second language learners to be exposed to real-world language input and to control it in meaningful ways. The OLA is essentially a collection of authentic conversations between native speakers in various target languages. These dialogs have been recorded, digitized, and made available on audio CD-ROMs; each dialog is considered one "archive." French, Japanese, and Spanish archives are currently available, and plans for a German archive are in progress. While the conversations are the central element, the OLA Project involves several other components that facilitate their use in language learning. These include transcriptions, translations, the OLA Players, and the Web-based database.

DESCRIPTION

The OLA dialogs are recorded at normal speed. They feature topics of interest to university level students; however, most could also be relevant to secondary students. One exception is the Spanish OLA in which a few instances of "salty" language might be considered inappropriate for younger students. The discourse is natural, so there are conversational overlaps and colloquial expressions characteristic of real speech (see [Figure 1](#)).

F: Siguiente.
 C: Sí. ¡Buenas tardes! ¿Me puede dar la . . los papeles para . . va . . para el pasaporte?
 F: Sí, sí, como no. Mire, aquí tiene papelito amarillo, uno de, papelito blanco. Este lo tienen que llenar tus padres.
 C: Ya
 F: [Y el papelito rosa]
 C: [Pero yo ya tengo dieciocho] años, eh.
 F: Pero, es que me da igual.
 C: Ah, bueno.

 F: *Next*
 C: *Yes, good afternoon, can you give me the. . the papers for. . uhm. . for the passport?*
 F: *Yes, sure, of course. Look, here is the yellow slip, one white paper. Your parents have to fill out this one.*
 C: *Okay.*
 F: *[And the pink paper]*
 C: *[But I'm already eighteen] years old, you know.*
 F: *Well, no matter.*
 C: *Uh, okay.*

Figure 1. Example from Dialog 37 of Spanish OLA Volume 1, *Sacando un pasaporte* (Getting a passport)

In the most basic configuration, the audio files can be played with a CD player. Thus, an instructor who has no access to a computer in the classroom or computer lab could make use of the OLA, as could an independent learner. Researchers might also utilize these materials for a variety of studies ranging from input processing to learning strategies.¹ Transcriptions and translations for all the dialogs are available for users such as these at the OLA Web site. The texts can be downloaded as word-processed files in both Macintosh and PC formats.

The Web site also includes [suggestions](#) for ways in which the OLA can be used both in the classroom and by individuals or small groups. Some examples portray the instructor playing a conversation and asking the students content questions or perhaps asking them to identify topics. Role plays are also possible; the instructor could play a line and ask the students to supply a possible next line. Students could even use the conversations as dictations or write short summaries. Intermediate and advanced students might be asked to identify the setting of a conversation or to perform a simultaneous translation. At all levels, the dialogs could be used for testing listening comprehension.

For each language there is also a database on the Web site which can be searched by topic and function. For example, in the [Spanish Web database](#), a query for the topic "Places" and the function "Making plans" yields 18 records. Clicking on each record reveals a wealth of detail: dialog number; duration, names, origins, and ages of informants; transcriptions; translations; and topics and functions. An instructor can therefore locate an example of a specific type of discourse very quickly, saving a significant amount of time.

If a computer is available, the OLA can be utilized in more sophisticated ways. The OLA Players (see [System requirements](#) above) are language-specific and can be downloaded from the Web site. These are currently available only for the Macintosh, although PC-compatible versions may be developed in the future. With the Players, the computer can perform some of the functions it does best to enhance language learning, such as allow the learner to control the audio and choose to read the associated text and/or translation.

The user begins the lesson by inserting the appropriate CD-ROM in the computer drive and launching the Player for the target language. A menu similar to the one shown in [Figure 2](#) appears:

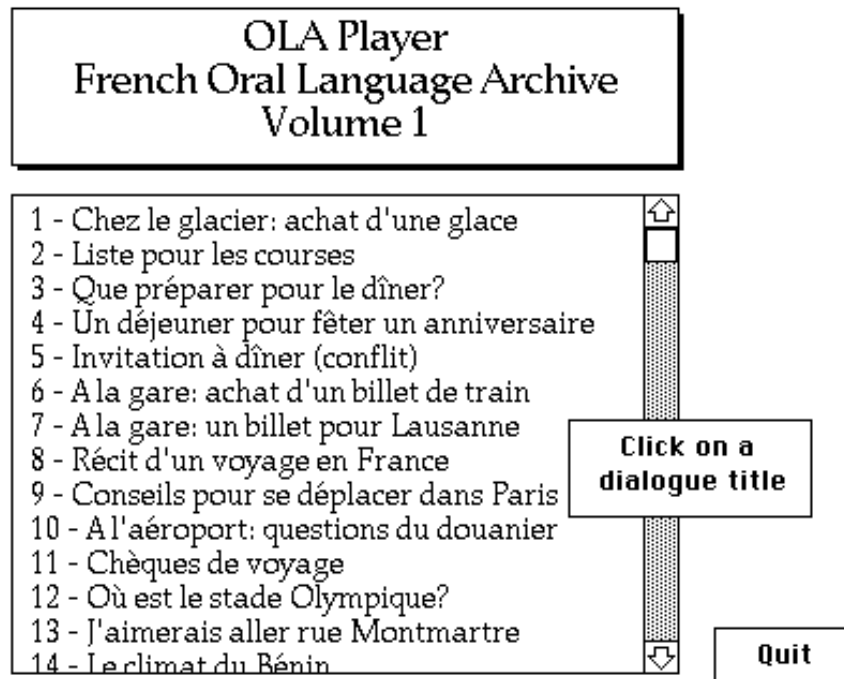


Figure 2. Opening screen for the OLA Player, French Oral Language Archive 1

The user selects a dialog, and it appears on the next screen as shown below (Figure 3).

Credits

11 - Chèques de voyage

Hubert Vasseur (banquier) & Laurence Petit (cliente)

Banquier - Bonjour, Madame.
 Cliente - Bonjour, Monsieur. Je voudrais des travelers pour...les Etats-Unis s'il vous plaît, pour un montant de 1000 francs.
 B - Pour un montant de 1000 francs. Et qu'est-ce que...quel genre de billets vous voulez? Vous voulez des billets de...10, 20 ou 100 dollars, ou...?
 C - Euh, plutôt des petites coupures...euh, 20 dollars.
B - 20 dollars? D'accord. Euh...qu'est-ce que... Oui, est-ce que vous...vous êtes la seule personne à signer sur les chèques ou bien est-ce que vous êtes deux? [Oui, oui]
 C - je...la seule personne .
 B - [ouais] D'accord.Ecoutez, j'ai besoin de votre signature ici. Et...vous devez donc signer tous les chèques devant moi.
 C -D'accord. Et ensuite, je les contresignerai...
 B - Et vous les ...[contresignerez] aux États-Unis lorsque vous les

CONTINUOUS
PLAY

||▶

||

▶

begin stop go on

LINE
PLAY

◀||

▲

▶

previous repeat next

English

Transcript

HideWords

?

Index

Quit

Figure 3. Dialog 11: *Chèques de voyage* (Traveler's checks)

In "Continuous play" mode, the student can press "begin" to hear the complete dialog. Each line will be highlighted as it is played, and the text automatically scrolls so that the selection being played is visible. At any point one can pause, begin again, or continue from the last line played. Lines can also be selected for playback in any order. In "line play" mode, individual lines can be played and repeated and the preceding and succeeding lines can likewise be played. These functions work in both the target language

and in English; the learner can switch from one to the other at will and can also choose to hide the text completely. An online "Help" screen is also readily available.

The Student Notebook option (as shown in [Figure 4](#)) allows the learner to type in notes, print them out, or save them as a text file.

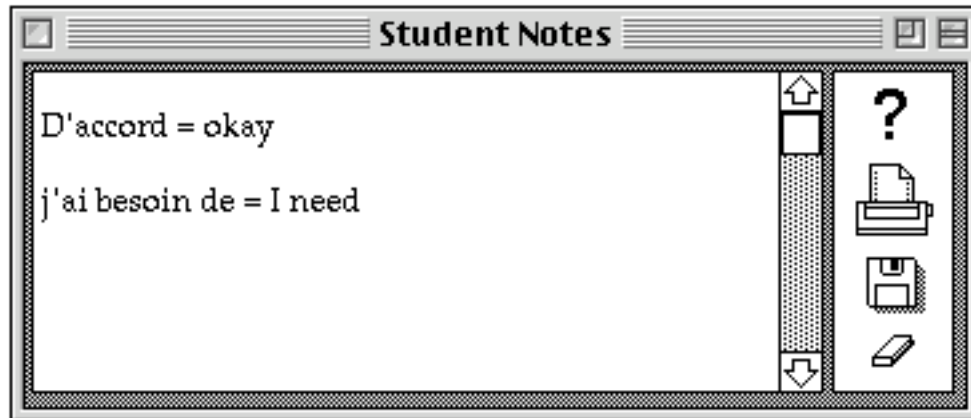


Figure 4. Example of Student Notes

The Japanese Player offers an added "glossary" feature ([Figure 5](#)) which displays the explanations for selected words and phrases above the dialog.

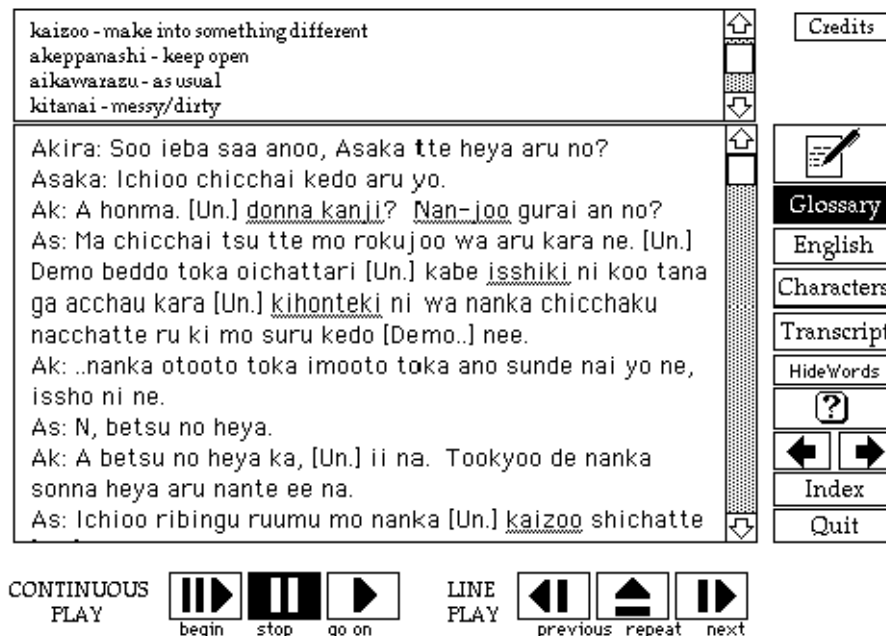


Figure 5. Glossary feature in the OLA Player, Japanese Oral Language Archive 1

This version offers the text to be displayed in *romaji*, as in the preceding example, or in Japanese characters, as in [Figure 6](#) below:

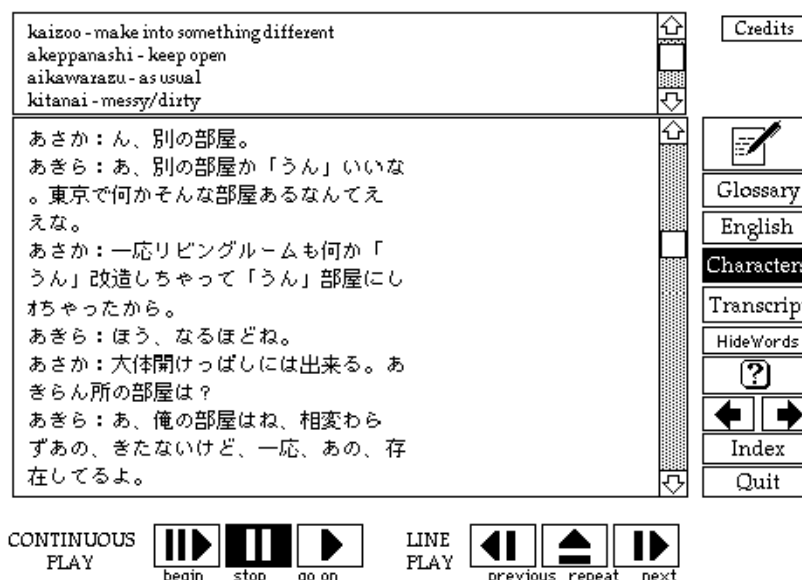


Figure 6. Dialog displayed in Japanese characters (OLA Player, Japanese Oral Language Archive 1)

In order to see the Japanese characters, it is necessary to have the Japanese Language Kit or Apple's System 8.5, which has viewing capability built in for several non-Roman alphabets.

As the "[Teaching and Learning with the OLA](#)" section of the Web site suggests, the OLA audio files also provide raw material which can be used to create CALL lessons for use as homework or as independent study in a self-access center. Authoring tools such as [Libra](#), [HyperCard](#), [SuperMacLang](#), [Dasher](#), [ToolBook](#), and [xMediaEngine](#) could be used for this purpose. Listening comprehension, "listen-record-compare," dictation, vocabulary, and cloze exercises come to mind. Permission to copy the files and distribute them within an institution is included with the purchase of a [site license](#) for each volume.

Still another possibility is to deliver the OLA within an institution via a Webserver. An intranet license permits this type of distribution and includes a CD-ROM with the audio files in [QuickTime](#) format. The CD-ROM also contains the transcriptions and translations as HTML documents. In the [samples](#) provided at the OLA Web site, each dialog can be played while the text is displayed in a straightforward fashion. However, one could also increase the level of interactivity of the Web pages by linking them to other programs or by producing pages that incorporate forms, JavaScript, or Java.²

CONCLUSION

After the initial fascination wears off, users abandon some multimedia-based CALL software with elaborate graphics and polished interfaces because there isn't enough content to engage them past the first few screens. In contrast to these programs, the OLA offers a gold mine of substance and utility. The conversations will prove challenging to intermediate and advanced students. Moreover, they will afford excellent practice in the types of everyday discourse a second language learner is likely to experience with native speakers.

The OLA appeals to me on many levels. It can be used in both low- and higher-tech settings. It is flexible enough to meet the needs of most learners and can accommodate a variety of institutional settings. Much latitude is left to the instructor to use the material in creative ways. For some, indeed, there may be too much leeway, as not all end users will understand how to exploit the many possibilities of the OLA. There are excellent [suggestions for usage](#) on the Web site, but some ideas may not resonate with the average language instructor unless they are adequately demonstrated. For example, there may be too great a leap between the provision of an audio CD-ROM and the recommendation that

"record/playback/compare" exercises be created. To assist in bridging this gap, supplemental information in the form of detailed sample lesson plans, handouts, and screen shots of CALL exercises could be posted on the Web site.

In the OLA, Director Chris Jones has provided an extraordinary resource for foreign language instructors and learners. The Project is the culmination of several years of recording, digitizing, transcribing, and translating, but it is still a work in progress. I look forward to volumes in additional languages, as well as to the development of new ways to use these materials.

NOTES

1 Permission to use the OLA for research is not covered by the standard site license. Potential researchers should contact [OLA](#) for more information.

2 For more information on how to create interactive Web-based CALL activities, see Bob Godwin-Jones' [Language Interactive](#) and Douglas Mills' [JavaScript for Language Learning](#).

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

[Claire Bradin](#) is a Ph.D. student at Michigan State University. Her research interests include the implementation of technology in language learning, faculty development, and computer-assisted research in language acquisition.

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